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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 001192

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH YEMENI FM ABU BAKR AL-QIRBI

Classified by Ambassador Richard Olson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Meeting on the margins of the October 19 Forum for the Future ministerial in Abu Dhabi, Deputy Secretary Negroponte heard from Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi that Yemen was committed to parliamentary elections in spite of the "headache" of democracy. He blamed the emergence of the Al-Houthi rebellion on Iranian efforts to influence the region. Al-Qirbi assured the Deputy that Jamal Al-Badawi, the Yemeni convicted in the USS Cole bombing, is in Yemeni custody and facing further legal procedures. Al-Qirbi said the sophistication of the recent attack on AmEmbassy Sana'a suggested a new approach by Al Qaeda -- while not necessarily growing in strength or number, the organization is being led in a new direction. Lamenting the three-fold increase in refugees from the Horn of Africa in recent months, Al-Qirbi said Yemen has asked European envoys to help safeguard the coastline from Somali pirates. He noted rehabilitation for Guantanamo returnees as another area for international cooperation. Citing GoY eagerness for U.S. assistance, including the restoration of Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and education programs, he said education is the solution to many of Yemen's problems and assistance in that arena should flow irrespective of political differences. The GoY hopes the next three months create momentum in the relationship to carry into the next U.S. administration, noted Al-Qirbi, citing an MCC agreement and high level visits as potential elements of such momentum. End summary.

¶2. (C) ELECTIONS: Noting the importance of next year's parliamentary elections, Al-Qirbi called democracy "a headache", but the best system available to Yemen. The government is in dialogue with Yemeni opposition parties, has established an election committee and has made changes in the country's election laws. Al-Qirbi expressed hope that the government's concessions will entice the opposition to participate in elections. He noted a trend of internal squabbling amongst opposition parties and voiced concern that this dissension could scuttle negotiations between the government and opposition.

¶3. (S) INTERNAL SECURITY: President Ali Abdullah Saleh has put an end to the fighting in North Yemen, but the region has not stabilized completely. Al-Qirbi blamed the emergence of the Al-Houthi rebellion on Iranian efforts to develop influence "from Bahrain to Yemen". He described links between the rebels and the Iranian Embassy in Sana'a and dated the beginning of the rebellion to the return of several rebels from their studies in Iran.

¶4. (C) COUNTERTERRORISM: Deputy Secretary Negroponte expressed U.S. interest in the case of Jamal Al-Badawi, the Yemeni terrorist convicted in the USS Cole bombing. Al-Qirbi assured Negroponte that Al-Badawi, who was previously released under house arrest while cooperating with Yemeni authorities, is in Yemeni custody and will face a new prosecution. He stressed the need to resolve Al-Badawi's case through Yemen's legal system and find an appropriate punishment for his crimes.

¶5. (C) Al-Qirbi suggested that the recent attack on AmEmbassy Sana'a underlined the need for a new counterterrorism partnership and strategy. As evidenced by the sophistication of the Embassy attack, a new generation of Al Qaeda has emerged and is leading the organization in a new direction. Yemen's security forces are alert to the threat of terrorism, but require additional training in

intelligence, surveillance and counterterrorism methods. Enhanced cooperation with the GCC on counterterrorism, similar to the ongoing efforts between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, would both improve Yemen's capacity in this area and contribute to Yemen's goal of integration into the GCC.

¶16. (C) Al-Qirbi insisted Al Qaeda in Yemen has not grown in strength or number. Al Qaeda's strategy previously was to use Yemen as a base of operations while carrying out attacks in Iraq and elsewhere. However, the GoY's ongoing counterterrorism efforts have placed increasing pressure on Al Qaeda and created a relationship of confrontation.

¶17. (C) HORN OF AFRICA: Al-Qirbi expressed concern about the impact of continued instability in the Horn of Africa on Yemen's security. Refugee flows to Yemen have tripled in the last two months, primarily from Somalia but also from Eritrea and Ethiopia. The Yemeni government has requested assistance from European Ambassadors in Sana'a in safeguarding Yemen's coastline from Somali pirates. It sees piracy as an issue of mutual concern and an area for potential cooperation between Yemen and the GCC.

¶18. (C) GUANTANAMO DETAINEES: Al-Qirbi, with a caution that he was speaking personally, described the GoY proposal for a rehabilitation center for returned Guantanamo detainees as "inadequate". The approach to rehabilitation must be long-term and address psychological as well as physical concerns. Just "jailing them" or "getting them married" would not be sufficient. The GoY is engaging with European governments and NGOs to develop a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy.

¶19. (C) ASSISTANCE: The GoY is eager for an expansion of U.S.

ABU DHABI 00001192 002 OF 002

assistance, including the restoration of suspended Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and education programs. Al-Qirbi argued that education is the solution to many of Yemen's problems, including terrorism and religious intolerance. Educational assistance should not then be predicated on political criteria. The signing of an MCC agreement would also be an important demonstration of a strong U.S. - Yemen partnership and a source of much-needed assistance, as declining oil revenues place pressure on the GoY budget. President Saleh has also urgently requested the U.S. provide the GoY with security equipment.

¶10. (C) THE WAY FORWARD: Al-Qirbi described the relationship as at a turning point. The GoY hopes to use the next three months to create momentum in the bilateral relationship that will carry through to the next U.S. administration. There is a real need for each side to be serious, honest, and committed, but communication "between some officials" has been lacking. President Saleh hopes to have ongoing open and intensive discussions with the USG on Yemen's relations with the GCC, Iran and the Horn of Africa. Signing an MCC agreement, restoring education programs, and receiving high level USG visitors in Sana'a would send a message that the U.S. and Yemen have a robust partnership that should be maintained.

¶11. (SBU) U.S. Participants:

- The Deputy Secretary
- Ambassador Richard Olson
- NEA A/S David Welch
- Aaron Jost, D Staff
- Susannah Cooper, Note taker

Yemeni Participants:

- FM Abu Bakr Al-Qirbi
- Abdul Hakim al-Aryani, Director of the Minister's Office
- Zayed al-Ureis, Office of the President

¶12. (U) The Deputy Secretary's party cleared on this cable.

OLSON